

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Letting Go

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This research-creation is a photographic-videographic approach to the concept of fatherhood. It is based on my experience as a father of two children aged ten and thirteen since our arrival as a family in Canada in 2022. It is a panoramic view of a time of change where, facing the challenges of fatherhood towards growing children, I begin a search in my years as a son with a father (who passed away in 2018) who marked and still marks my becoming in the world as well as my work as a father. His memory and his way of exercising fatherhood influence mine, which I feel as a middle ground between what I lived in my childhood-adolescence and the present-future of my children. If being a father implies conflicts and disagreements, how do childhood memories and reminiscences influence my practice as a father and the models I try to transmit to my children? My base of work is the world of family photography and filmmaking. Belonging to the environment that is photographed and filmed is a very powerful artistic-reflexive practice that opens thought to what is common to us as humans: the constant presence of belonging and separation in our work as parents.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, A. Salazar.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the generous help and guidance of many people. First of all, to my family, my wife Paulina and my children Elias and Nael. They have been my driving force and my guide during these two years of hard work.

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Dedication

To my sons Elías and Nael, and my father, Paco.

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Introduction to the series.

My thesis work is the natural evolution of a body of work I have been doing since 2010 when I started photographing my family after my wife Paulina's pregnancy. Prior to that time my photographic practice had been focused on the outside world, with long term photographic and film documentary projects. My photos, now in my home, opened a new universe for me, that of the unconditional bond between a mother and her children as they gradually separate from their bodies. That record continues to create a collective memory for my family, a database to which the four of us constantly return. At the same time that I was photographing, I began to videotape moments of the children and the family growing up. At first these recordings were made with a view to a possible documentary about learning to speak. That documentary did not happen, but the recordings continued over the years.

Upon arriving in Canada in 2022 for my first project in the program I focused on my eldest son Elias and his way of relating to this new environment. That first project took a clear turn when I involved in the narrative my presence as a father and as a photographer at the same time. From that moment on and throughout these two years I have deepened the father/photographer-children relationship. I think that every photographer is always involved in a process of self-reflection when he takes a camera. The image that is captured or imagined or constructed becomes for the creator a return or a mirror of him/herself. This aspect is part of the creative-research focus of this thesis.

I have been working in documentary film and photography for some time and I see both territories as different but with certain similarities. One purpose of my work is to bring the

photographic and cinematographic gaze closer together, posing them as territories that feedback on each other in my creative process. It is my intention to look for the traces of the photographic in the filmic and vice versa when I am behind the photographic or video camera.

My project is a panoramic view of a time when my children begin to grow up and approach adolescence and a memory of my father and his imprint on me and how these two worlds are intertwined. I have been taking photos and videos of my children for over a decade and I want to relate it to my childhood photos, texts and a video piece. The recorded video material and photographs from those years back in Ecuador, I believe, were always made to capture everyday moments as a repository of memory. When I look at that material and compare it to our family's current life in Canada, a new dynamic emerges that could be summarized as follows:

MEMORY, SEPARATION, PERMANENCE, LEARNING, CYCLE.

1. MEMORY

The exercise of memory is always a builder of identity and rootedness. Memory builds and prepares for the future.

2. SEPARATION

For me the separation between children and parents is a natural fact, silent, subtle and without big jumps, my children take a small step every day towards their independence (still far away) almost without realizing it. The memory of the past (in photos or video) reinforces the idea of separation, of a distance that widens between my children and me and even between them.

3. PERMANENCE

This separation comes from the permanence of the other (the parent), who continues to be necessary for them and for me. The parent-child union marks our life. It marks us. The father remains, even if he is no longer there, with time he becomes part of us. In my opinion, this sense is the deepest in my search and I relate it to the presence of my deceased father. He is in my dreams, sometimes in the sound of my voice and more than once in my reflection in the mirror. His presence is less and less uncomfortable, that is my path, to reach a cordial "LET GO".

4. LEARNING

This dual feeling, being with and not being with, has allowed me to reflect with a particular perspective on what it means to be a father and has produced a trip in my memory to the days of my childhood with my father, a strict and loving man at the same time.

This coexistence with my father compels me to learn to be a better father, in a better way than he was. I feel him as a force that pulls me to the past, but as a spring it pushes me to the front, towards the appropriate behavior, respectful, not authoritarian, always in search of understanding and sensitivity.

5. CYCLE

This journey reflects the present I live with my children, where firmness and affection coexist. I think that in the future my children will repeat a similar process, like an endless cycle of which we are a part. I am a father who is aware of his faults and tries to correct them, but who at the same time assumes that he is part of a life cycle in which, whether he wants to or not, he repeats and relives practices from the past.

In my work, I embrace the idea of family photography and video as territories of contemporary thought and artmaking that go beyond the amateur practice of recording images (photos and

videos) solely as a cohesive practice for the exclusive use of the family group. My images are memory exercises that invite reflection and ask viewers to take a personal journey into their own family histories and parental-filial relationships, while considering the permanence of wounds from the past and the shadows they cast on their lives. This work speaks to and circulates amidst thematics frequently encountered in contemporary photography and personal cinema.

Fundamentals

Contemporary photography has evolved in recent years around practices of creating images of the familiar and private world, as opposed to previous practices more focused on the social and public. The profession of the photojournalist was framed by the needs of the press and magazines to portray what was happening in the world. A subjective turn of the documentary gaze took the camera inside the home and later inside the observer. Two of the most relevant projects of this shift in the 1980s and 1990s were Sally Mann's **Immediate Family** and Nan Goldin's **Ballad of Sexual Dependency**. The presence of more photographic projects on the family, upbringing and the first years of life, a complex territory due to its poetics and the difficulties it poses to parents and children, has focused more on the gaze and the register of the mother or woman in general. Books such as *Madres e Hijas* (2003) or *Immediate Family* (1992) show the closeness of the mother to her children, which produces an almost immediate response to artistic creation. In the first, Lestido's images speak of ambivalent exchanges and, as Sara Facio states in the text "Eternal Bonds", of a "transcendent desire to be together" (Facio 2003, 7). In the second book mentioned, the absence of the father is evident; he is not part of the image even though he shares the house and the time together (summer). Sally Mann participates in the creation and, as she mentions in her introductory text, for her, her photos are immersive, fictional and fantastic

(Mann 1992, 12). They are photos by the mother - artist of the children - models. However, when the father is the artist or the photographer, the images circulate less. Are there fewer fathers who are artists? Are new forms of fatherhood not yet the norm in Western societies? Maybe fathers have stayed less at home with their children in their early years; when they started to stay, photos started to appear. Another reason might have to do with the way the parent-photographers were raised (with distance and disconnection) and that their being in the role of parent caused a shift in their parenting patterns and thus in their motive for their work.

Fathers today can be thought of in two possible territories: "manly fatherhood" and "involved fatherhood" (Kangas, E., Lamsa, A., & Heikkinen, S. 2017, 19). The aforementioned text distinguishes in its conclusions the existence of four ways of viewing fatherhood: "sustaining fatherhood", "uncommitted fatherhood", the "best moments of fatherhood" and "practical fatherhood". This idea of practical fatherhood involves not only doing more things around the house but also accessing in a "practical" way other role models that embrace the sensitive and some practices coded as feminine. Equally important is how parenting relates to the parents' past. As parents of growing children, we find ourselves in a middle ground between the past experienced by us and the future that awaits the children. This limbo of sorts is a complex and confusing territory in which we learn to live from day to day while thinking about the past. Donald Unger mentions in his book *Men Can*, that we must rewrite the narratives of our childhood without forgetting where we came from. (Unger 2010, 111). Memories accompany and occupy space, in *Fathers: a celebration in prose, poetry, and photography of fathers and fatherhood*, a book by Alexandra Towle in an intertitle is written a Romani proverb "you have to dig deep to bury your father." (Towle 1986, 249). To dig deep is to look at the father (or mother)

and close the wounds. Without this step, the process is truncated. In *In the heart of a merciful father*, a chapter by Stephen Mattern in the book *Fatherhood philosophy for everyone - The Dao of Daddy*, (Lon S. Nease and Michael W. Austin, ed) makes the case that when things from the past are not resolved, what this produces is a barrier to mutual love and understanding (Mattern 2010, 132). It is important to learn from the past to allow for growth and learning, but it is also important to realize that, as we are made of that past, we are but another cog in a constant cycle of learning. The appearance of a son takes the memory to a past place where the progenitors reappear and bring the present into comparison. They use their art, then, as an outlet for questions that do not always have a clear answer. Being a parent is something that is learned with difficulty.

This project is an approach to that difficulty from a subjective perspective and with distance at the same time, with the intention of generating reflection and a bit of relief as well. I believe that doing family photography and video starts from the need for reconnection and the discovery of how we parents develop ways with our children that are inspired, protected or opposed to those we received as children. The image, captured or created, gives us back an image of the child but at the same time, reflects on the relationship between camera and subject, understood as a dialogue, an agreement, a pact. Photographing and filming, then, are territories of contact and mutual understanding.

On the other hand, this work is framed within a tradition of family photographs and videos that serve, or have served, to reinforce shared memories but rarely as territories of learning and

reflection on learned practices that we consider “natural”. Contemporary photography's move to open up private realms builds on the reflective purpose and growth that art can provoke.

Research Review

My process begins with my first project LOOK AT ME where I established a dialogue between photos of my son from his early years until the age of 11 (already in Canada), interweaving his photos with photos of him and me to finally close with self-portraits where I look at myself and question the viewer about who the title of the series is about.



Figure 1.1 *Look at me*, by Armando Salazar, 2022.



Figure 1.2 *Look at me*, by Armando Salazar, 2022.



Figure 1.3 *Look at me*, by Armando Salazar, 2022.

These are some questions I asked myself in the development of the series:

- Who looks?
- Why does he look?
- What is he looking for?
- What happens to the one who is being looked at?
- What happens to the one who looks?

Having involved my image and my perspective in the series is a point of rupture with my past practice and is the foundational basis for my work throughout the MFA and that closes with the final exhibition.

My second project LINK and the third, FAREWELL were approaches where my presence as an intermediary between my children's lives and my reflections on the passage of time (LINK-video) and the memory of my father from a letter I wrote to him when he passed away in 2018 (FAREWELL-photography) is increasingly appreciated.

This letter is an important turning point because it triggered the emergence of a larger narrative: past (my memories of my childhood with my father), presents (my children's lives) and future (the gradual distancing between them and me). The fourth project (photography and video) BY MY SIDE was an extension of the previous one and includes a video where I incorporated the idea of the cyclical. In the final scene I put together two moments of my son: as an infant and as a child facing the same challenge, to ride a vehicle that allows him to travel and distance himself. In the early childhood images, the toy car moves away from and toward my camera; in the present, the bicycle circles the camera, but does not approach it. Something remains the same, but something has changed. The cycle repeats itself, but there is a slight variation.

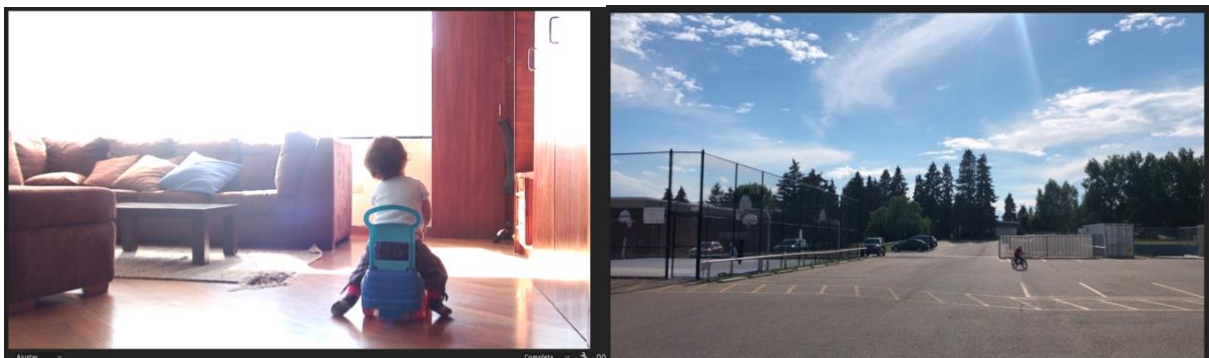


Figure 2.1 *By my side*, by Armando Salazar, 2023.



Figure 2.2 *By my side*, by Armando Salazar, 2023.

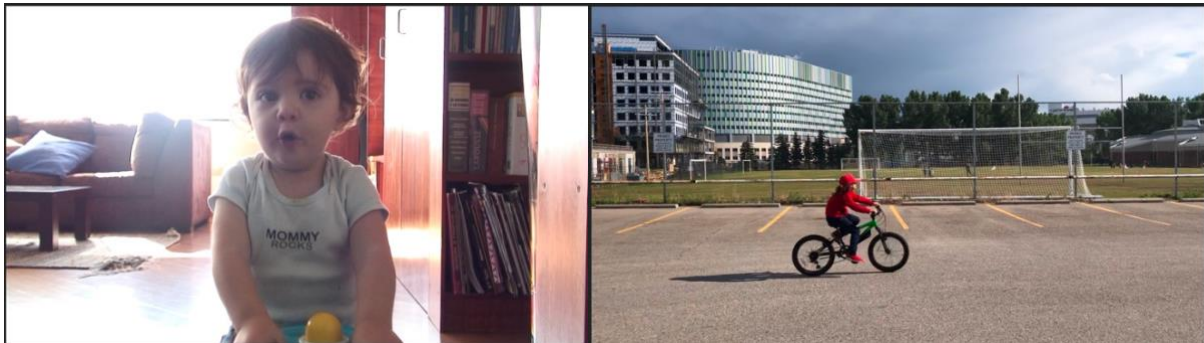


Figure 2.3 *By my side*, by Armando Salazar, 2023.

Separation, the passage of time, emotional distance and cyclicity are the coordinates of my work and are my feelings about what it means to be a father, to be in a constant state of relationship between what is lived as a son and what is given as a father. In my opinion, both documentary photography and personal film are ideal tools to tell this kind of story.

Contemporary family photography portrays family ties, themes of memory and certain distinct ways of life. My work is part of a current trend of photographic recording in private spaces. Work such as *Madres e Hijas*, *The fragility of fatherhood*, *Rock, paper, scissors*, among others.

Although the themes of memory, identity, landscape (rural or urban) have already been used, the particularity of my work is the union of these elements with the idea of learning, of how the ties between parents and children can be a relief for past traumas: traumas that come from an idea of

masculinity that sometimes we think we have already overcome. The main idea, I think, is that being a father gives us the possibility of a second chance and a reconciliation with the past.

On the other hand, personal documentary cinema, as a variant of the avant-garde approaches initiated in the sixties, incorporates in the narrative the emotional point of view and the subjectivity of the filmmaker when he/she faces the recording of the close and the familiar. From the research of several documentary filmmakers of those years and some contemporary ones (Chantal Akerman, Jonas Mekas, Eric Pauwels, Robert Frank, Cara Morton, and Jose Luis Guerin.), I found some personal guidelines to approach this cinema:

- Extend my gaze to some objects and situations in my everyday space(s) that remind me of my childhood.
- The inclusion of myself without ultimately including myself. The voice out of frame, my breathing behind the camera.
- As Jean Rouch mentions, "I make my films starting from the end." It could be useful to start with sequences that go to the end of the narrative.
- Keep alive the idea of a cinema that provides the auteur with a mixture of discovery through invention.
- A self-portrait could be any narrative about others that informs the filmmaker's sense of self.
- Include references from my world and always narrate from within, drawing on resources from my life and knowledge.
- Always try to frame before the action appears. This is what I understand as an intermediate attitude between the cinema of Jonas Mekas and Maya Deren.

- Working with strict planning and strict freedom at the same time. Planning first, freedom later.
- To keep reacting to the circumstances of everyday life.
- Do not forget that the position of the camera is the "origin of the gaze".
- When using archival material, let the viewer know my relationship to it.
- Always create “Emotional images” that hold what I am feeling at the moment of shooting, a space for self-reflection while looking at the world. These images could be of nature, empty streets, or the window in my living room watching the exterior world.
- The voice-over constructs a meaning parallel to the image and the Voice-in dialogues and comments along with the image.
- During the editing, think of the cut as the space between two actions, between affects, between perceptions, between two visual images, between two sounds, and between sound and visual.

These guidelines help me when shooting and editing. It is a useful mechanism because it allows me to leave aside the classic practices of fiction (transparent narrative), documentary (reconstruction of the real fact) and video art (the image as an autonomous expression). This is a type of cinema, which I call PERSONAL CINEMA, and it is a cinema that one makes to connect with the world and oneself through images and sounds coming from the world one inhabits; it includes elements such as memory, the contemplation of the space one inhabits, thought, sharing and the use of diverse temporalities permeated by the filmmaker's emotionality and reflection.

In both my photography and my personal cinema, I have sought not only to propose a way of seeing the family (who sees whom and what happens to the one who is looking) but also to investigate the most pertinent ways to involve my presence and subjectivity in the final product.

Photographic references

In the last couple of years, I have encountered a few photographers who have approached family photography outside of the “family album” practice. Their work focuses on their family members, with an emphasis or theme running through the series. In my research, I look for the narrative that moves the series beyond using these references as visual guidelines: themes such as pain, old age, illness, death, loneliness, misunderstanding, the search for identity, growth, otherness, serenity, reflection, or the pleasure of living. I have sought to unite my practice with that of these artists/photographers/parents and, from this search, raise my own themes. These are the most important references and the ones that are closest to my work.



Figure 3.1 *The fragility of fatherhood*, by Troy Colby, 2022.

The fragility of fatherhood - Troy Colby

Themes: Pretending – Identity

Images that speak of an indestructible bond between father and son as a balm in the face of a tough world. One can only be a father if one assumes one's own fragility; they are images full of silence and complicity and with a very controlled aesthetic, they are not snapshots but directed photos.



Figure 3.2 *Nicolas & Adrien A world with two sons* by Martine Fougerson, 2019.

Nicolas & Adrien A World with Two Sons - Martine Fougerson

Themes: Growing-up – Bonds – Differences

Martine Fougerson has the ability to create complicity with her subjects, there is a lot of spontaneity over a certain direction in the images. Her use of color is expressive, as well as the use of natural and artificial light. They are photos full of sensuality and adolescent energy. I see it as a project akin to the photos I take of my children when they both occupy the frame.



Figure 3.3 *Son* by Christopher Anderson, 2013.

Son - Christopher Anderson

Themes: Understanding the father - Life and death - Puberty

The photographer builds a relationship with his son that leads him to think about the relationship he has with his own father (who in the narrative is going through an illness), leading the story to a reflection on death as well. I am interested in some photos that create a mood about what it means to grow up.



Figure 3.4 *Madres e Hijas* by Adriana Lestido, 2003.

Madres e Hijas - Adriana Lestido

Themes: Ambivalence – Attachment - Landscape - Separation

Adriana Lestido looks at the mother-daughter relationship as two sides of a coin, inseparable but different at the same time. Her ambivalent look is accurate for a very complex phenomenon full of conflicts and love at the same time. There is a very clear project in her gaze. It is a very present pattern in my work, I constantly come back to these photos trying to find the link within the image and how to transport it to the link between my camera and my children.



Figure 3.5 *Portraits of my father* by Antoine Didienne, 2022.

Portraits of my father - Antoine Didienne

Themes: Similarity - Difference - Change

The photographer controls the framing, the light, the distance and the optics so that a part of the parent-child relationship emerges with transparency. The similarities emerge, the differences not so much, the staged photographic approach seems insufficient for the phenomenon because it limits the possibility of the appearance of contrast or opposition between parents and children. It is a project charged with positive emotions but distant from the less luminous sides of the relationship such as difference, separation or lack of communication.



Figure 3.6 *On the Nest* by Dona Schwartz, 2015.

***On the Nest* - Dona Schwartz**

Themes: Loneliness – Memory

They are very direct and clear images about waiting and remembering. The camera captures the subjects in the present (the parents) but the space speaks of both the future and the past. It is a very thoughtful and directed work. I am struck by the subtlety of the gaze to capture parental fragility.



Figure 3.7 *Rock, Paper, Scissors* by Mathieu Chaze, 2021.

Rock, paper, scissors - Mathieu Chaze

Themes: Rivalry - Identity

Childhood and its deep relationship with nature. In these photos children are natural beings that occupy nature. For the photographer, human beings belong to nature and are beings of passage. His images speak of the deep union between nature, human life, childhood and rivalry. I am very interested in the images of the two children framed in nature, in my case, in the streets of Calgary. It is a constant reference

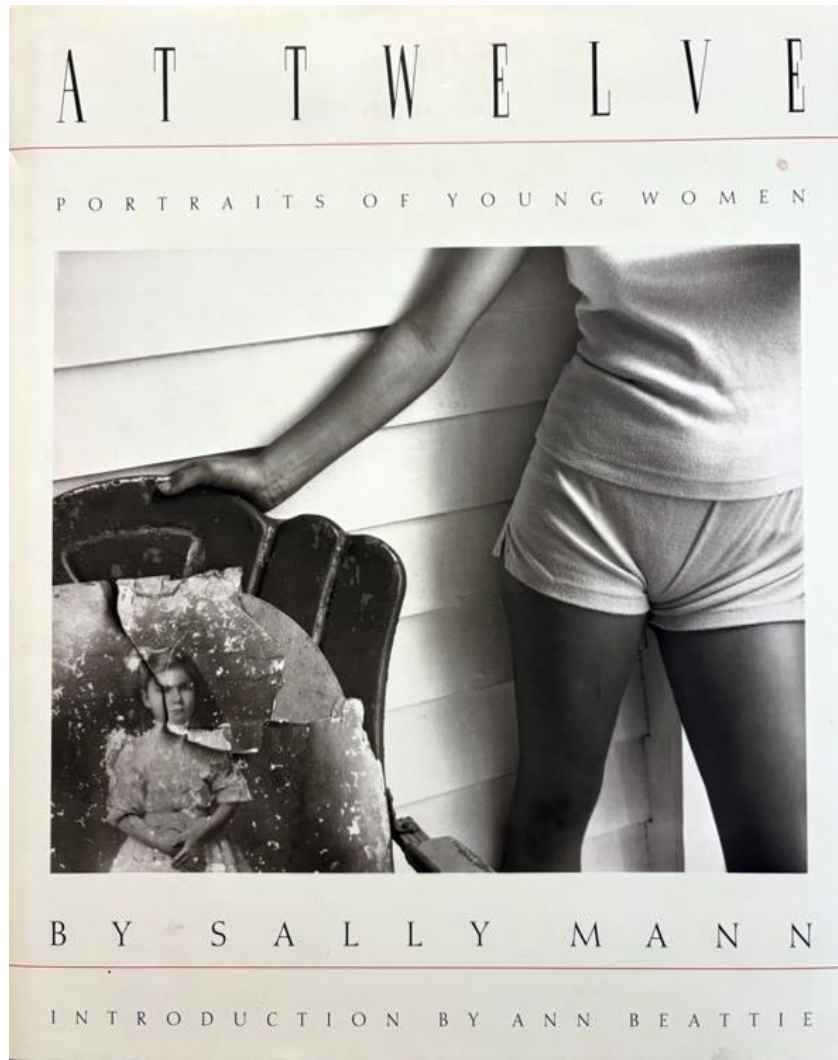


Figure 3.8 *At Twelve* by Sally Mann, 1988.

At twelve - Sally Mann

Themes: Growth - Identity - Separation

Girls are shown gradually approaching adolescence, in a world full of uncertainties as well as learned behaviors. Mann shows girls assuming the adolescent space with their bodies even though they have not fully arrived there. Many of these behaviors are also a reaction to the adult world and the need to be different from their parents. My oldest son is thirteen years old, I look for moments in his life where this reference appears.



Figure 3.9 *The Brothers* by Elin Hoyland, 2014.

The Brothers - Elin Hoyland

Themes: Similarity - Difference – Companionship - Rivalry

A series of photographs of two very similar brothers in their last years of life. It serves as an idea to see what unites and separates my children. This work inspires me to see how they occupy similar spaces and how despite the differences and similarities, they share a bond that unites and separates them from their parents.

Two projects in this section are constant references in my photographic work: *On the Nest* for its ability to photograph the fragility of parents and *Mothers and Daughters* for the diverse and expressive ways of portraying the mother-daughter bond (in my case, father-son).

Film references

As for cinema, my main references come from avant-garde personal documentary cinema. For me, this approach to cinema is very close to photographic practice. I would say that both media, photo and film, are two sides of the same coin. It is a type of filmmaking that is created alone, the director is the cameraman and almost always the editor of the material. It is not a complicated cinema (there is no big equipment, or many people involved) but it is very complex because it is not only the filmmaker's sensibility and technique but also his relationship with his memory and personal history. Some of the references I have found are:



Figure 4.1 *Conversations in Vermont* by Robert Frank, 1971.

***Conversations in Vermont* - Robert Frank**

Themes: Memory – Non-communication

The director (and character at the same time), tries to communicate with his characters (his children) not in an inquisitive way. He observes with discomfort and suspicion his teenage children who, despite Frank's showing them pictures of their childhood, seem bewildered by the intentionality of a father who wants to unite past and present. Frank is trying to interview and be a father at the same time. It is unclear whether he is trying to connect or to make a film, and the film is the expression of that ambiguity. His children see the photos and remember little. In the photos of the boys' childhood, it is clear that Frank, the photographer, was interested in capturing everything that happened. That seems to be the idea of the documentary: a father who observes but is not observed in the same way. This documentary opened up the idea for me to get involved in the narrative and not just be a witness to my children's lives, but to try to see them in greater depth.



Figure 4.2 *As I was moving ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* by Jonas Mekas, 2000.

As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty

Jonas Mekas

Theme: Freedom in life

In the cinema of Jonas Mekas, the hand-held camera is born from an intuition in front of the environment. He improvises and films automatically and uses a montage of simultaneous voices. His cinema is strong because of the strength of having captured (or having tried to capture) the exact moment. Mekas' camera is a tool for reading the world that revalues the everyday and proposes a new cinema unbound by the needs of mainstream cinema. A free cinema. I am interested in Mekas' attitude towards the world (the world of cinema and his own). For him every filmic act is valid, a guideline that I follow in my personal work.



Figure 4.3 *The Distance I Can Be from My Son* by Lenya Clayton, 2013.

***The distance I can be from my son (video series)* - Lenya Clayton**

Theme: Fear of life - Fear of distance

The director sets up the camera, her son (two years old) walks away and at some point she runs behind the camera looking for him. The distance varies in each location: greater distance and time in the park, shorter distance and time in the supermarket. I see this short film as a memory of what it was like: my children now run away from me and I no longer run after them. Currently it is a coming and going towards me, like a spring that loosens over time.



Figure 4.4 *Letter from a Filmmaker to his Daughter* by Eric Pauwels, 2002.

***Letter from a Filmmaker to His Daughter* - Eric Pauwels**

Themes: Memory – Legacy – Personal narrative

Pauwel's film is a personal documentary with voice-over narration. The filmmaker tells successive stories as a letter to his daughter. He returned to two moments from this film, the phrase: "I have the impression that I have caught your eye" and the closing, a collage of everything that the documentary has shown. My search in this type of cinema is to recognize this foreign gaze and use editing as a mechanism for reflection on memory.



Figure 4.5 *News from home* by Chantal Akerman, 1976.

News from home (documentary film) - Chantal Akerman

Themes: Connection - Distance

Still shots of New York with some camera movement on the subway, in a car or on a ferry. Over these images, Akerman's voice, reading the letters her mother sends her, generates a fascinating narrative. We see the city and hear family stories. I find the idea of a film about two worlds that are connected despite the distance very interesting. Akerman's voice is her mother's voice and the images she films in New York are in some ways her mother's imagination. The device is simple but powerful. It helps me find a link between my writing about my father and his voice.



Figure 4.6 *Down There* by Chantal Akerman, 2006.

Down There (documentary film) - Chantal Akerman

Themes: Connection – Distance - Confession

Down There is a documentary filmed from inside an apartment in Tel Aviv where the filmmaker observes the city and, through voice-overs and phone calls, builds a narrative about the Jewish question, her childhood and her family. The film contains numerous reflective texts about the filmmaker, her state of mind and how she approaches her life. It is a confession to the world while the image shows us what she sees. I am interested in the framing that captures what the person behind the camera feels at that moment, a tool that I try to use in my practice.



Figure 4.7 *Across* by Cara Morton, 1997.

Across - Cara Morton

Themes: Cycles - Repetition - Nature

A film that uses the concept of ACROSS to show someone's swimming across a river where the expressive editing makes me think about the different meanings of the title. I am interested in how an idea can be manifested filmically in various forms. In my final video I will include images about the cycles of life. In the short film, the cycles will be told with images of the changing of the seasons.

To conclude, I want to highlight three films: *Letter from a Filmmaker to His Daughter* for its ability to unite fictional, purely documentary and experimental sequences in the same narrative, *News from Home* for the way Akerman includes herself in the film without being included by using her voice, the off-camera and the camera position, and Mekas' *As I Was Moving Ahead* *Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* where the hand-held camera is intuitive in front of the environment. He improvises and films automatically to capture (or try to capture) the exact moment. He creates a cinema full of lyricism born from the banal. These three references appear continuously in my work process.

THESIS Exhibition

Title: LETTING GO

The thesis presentation includes:

1. Twenty-one medium-sized black and white photographs
2. Five photos from my childhood with my father,
3. Texts from a letter to my father
4. Seven minute video.

1. Twenty-one black and white photographs.

The photographs are spontaneously taken in 35 mm black and white with some direction on my part. I try to frame beforehand and wait for the right moment to take the shot. I'm uncomfortable with the staged image, but sometimes, I must organize the framing and give some direction. In these photos, I involved my two sons in the image and established a particular relationship between them. I also included some photos of my presence in reflections in glass, in very defined shadows and in a mirror with my eldest son Elias. The series' first and last photos are shadows of me and Elias in trees. I see them as images of a presence-absence and the roots we create in life.



Figure 5.1 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024.



Figure 5.2 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024.



Figure 5.3 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024.



Figure 5.4 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024.



Figure 5.5 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024.



Figure 5.6 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.7 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.8 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.9 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.10 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.11 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.12 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.13 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.14 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.15 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.16 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.17 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.18 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.19 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.20 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 5.21 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024

2. Five photographs from my childhood with my father

After a search of the family archive, these five photos were chosen for their diverse perspectives on my relationship with my father, Paco. He holds me in his arms, holds me in his lap, puts his hand on my shoulder, carries me as a baby, and catches me in mid-air. The photos, filled with tenderness and company, counterpoint the text, which is explicit about some issues I had with him.



Figure 6.1 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 1969



Figure 6.2 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 1967



Figure 6.3 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 1974



Figure 6.4 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 1966

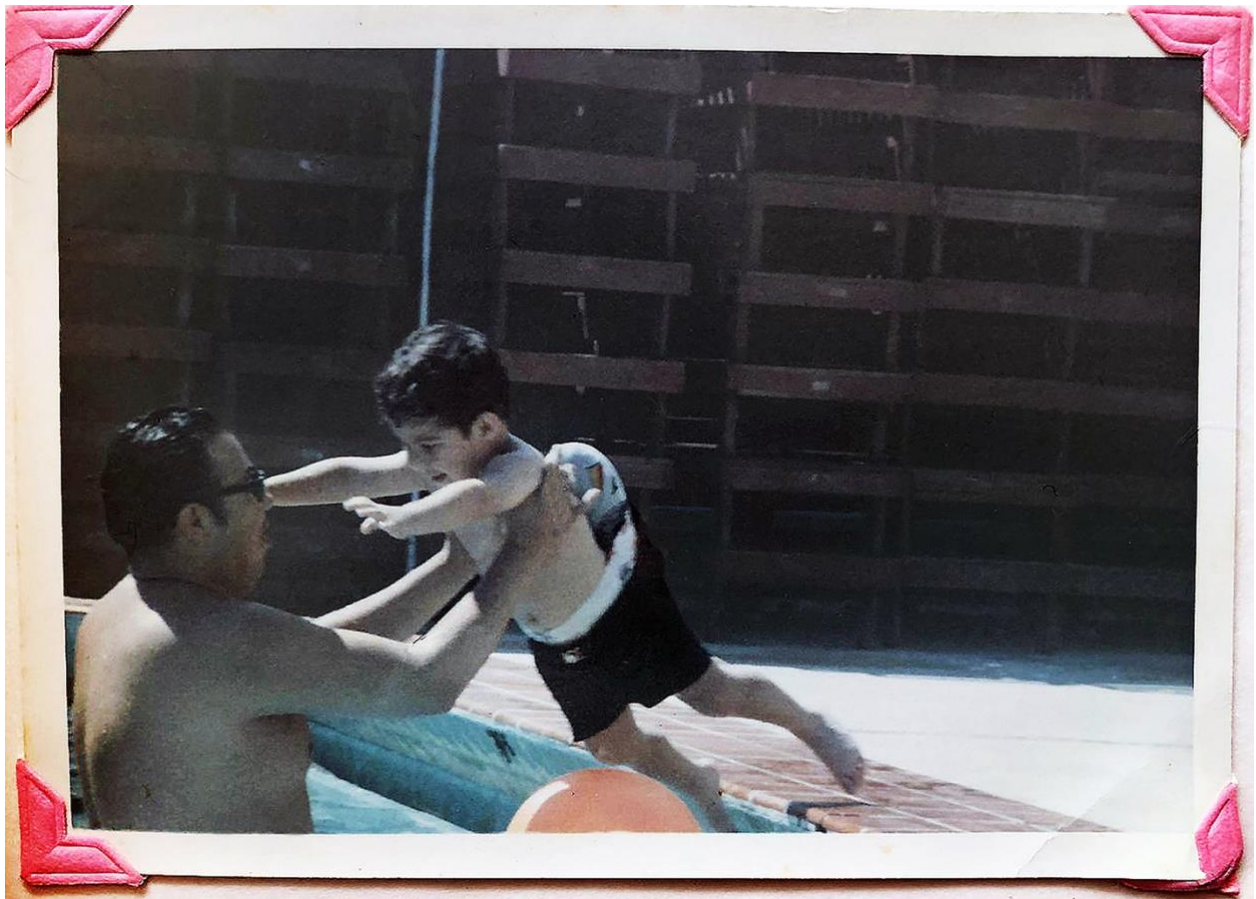


Figure 6.5 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 1969

3. Texts from a letter to my father

The texts were born from a letter I wrote to my father the day he passed away, September 18, 2018. Here is an excerpt from the original:

Sept 18. 2018

Me padre se ha ido, caminó en la noche por su escritorio buscándolo, topó la silla en la q se sentaba a comer, miro una foto, miro, miro, leo, trató de atraparlo pero ya no está. Mi memoria empieza a buscar gustos, ideas, recuerdos. Digo su voz cuando decía "Andrecut", "Marianito", "Marujito si me queris", "Mal, porque no te he visto". Me acuerdo de su delirio del 12 de Marzo cuando pateaba la cama del hospital y yo no sabía que hacer. Pasaron seis meses desde ese día hasta que dio un paso a un lado, decidió dejar de sufrir y se fue. Murió. Me aferré a esos momentos en los últimos meses en los que me acercaba a su rostro, pasaba mi mano por su pelo, le ponía la manguera del oxígeno, le tapaba con las cobijas y le daba un beso en la frente, me decía "gracias", a veces lloraba y decía "Mijo" "mi patrón blanco"; también me acordó treinta años atrás cuando bebía y llegaba tarde y decía "Arman, lo que quieras"; mi padre me dio el chance de tener mi propio tiempo, me permitió buscar mi vocación, la del cine, la de la foto, me permitió estudiar en la universidad mía, el día: siempre creyó en mí, yo era el que no creía en mí, su rudeza,

The texts were printed initially, but after some recommendations, I wrote them by hand on the wall using a graphite pencil. The size is a little small, and they are placed under the photos, not as a caption of each photo, but as an additional layer that accompanies the reading of the pictures and serves as a counterpoint to the images of my children. I propose a triangular reading about moments in my children's lives, the shadow of their photographer father and ideas about the life of someone who departed (my father).

- You are no longer here, I go through your desk at night looking for you
- I remember your harsh but sweet voice, your worried look, the sound of your heavy walk, your mocking laughter.
- For you, my work was anything but serious.
- "It's just a photo, who cares" you once said
- But in the end you allowed me to find my vocation.
- You were cruel and tender, you had two faces.
- But you always believed in me
- I find the chair where you used to sit to eat
- I look at a picture
- I try to catch a glimpse of you but you're gone.
- I still feel you in me,
- I miss you, old man.

4. Seven-minute film

<https://youtu.be/knY6qcAbAO8>

The short film is a video that reflects the feeling of being and not being present as a father in the life of my youngest son, Nael. It includes images and sounds recorded a few years ago, along with moments from the present. It is part of the traditional avant-garde documentary, both personal and subjective. The central theme is the repetitive cycles of life. It has no individual title, simply a date at the end of 2014-2024. Some tools I used were:

Jump Cuts

An editing tool that fragments the record giving it a feeling of chaos, improvisation, intuition and immediate reaction. For me it is a way of talking about repetition and a need to capture an idea, a moment, something essential to the narrative.

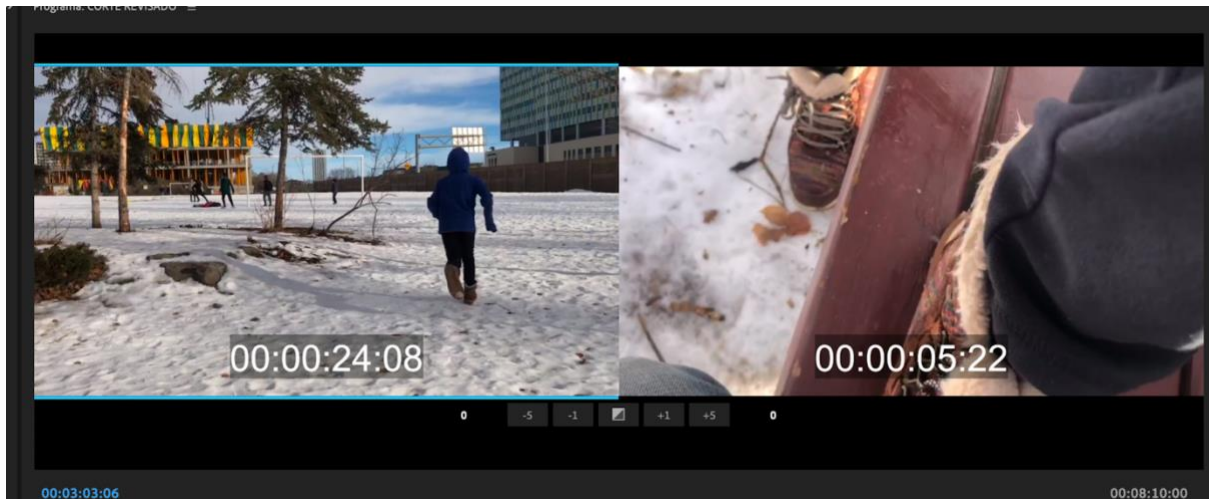


Figure 7.1 2014-2024 by Armando Salazar, 2024

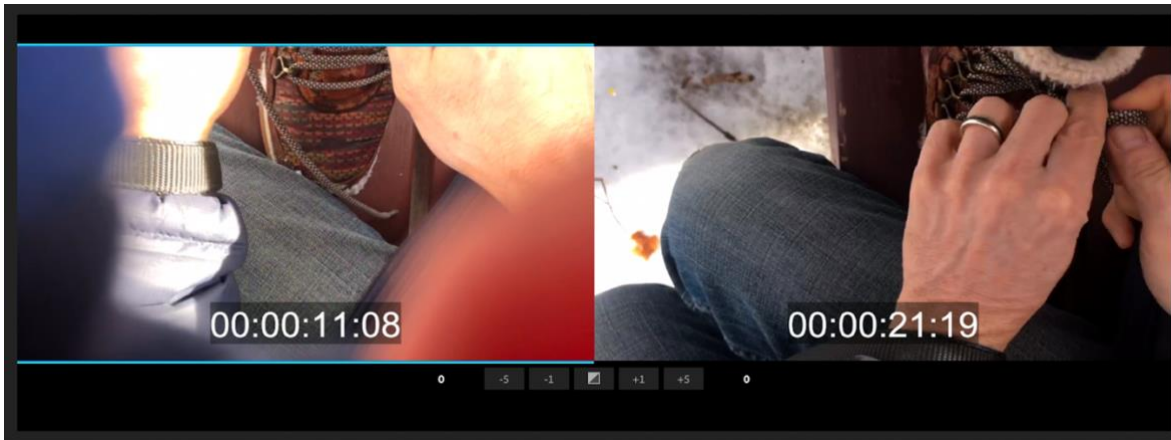


Figure 7.2 2014-2024 by Armando Salazar, 2024

Freeze frames

I freeze the image in certain moments of the narration where I emphasize the relationship between my son and me in a sort of dependence and need to accompany each other. At least eight years have passed between specific images, and with this resource, I mark my feeling as a father that things have not changed between me and my son even though time has passed.



Figure 7.3 2014-2024 by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 7.4 2014-2024 by Armando Salazar, 2024

Music

I am not a musician, but I enjoy playing the guitar. It is an instrument that has been with me since I was a teenager, and I use it as a space for rest, reflection and discovery. At the beginning of the short film, we hear the guitar tuned and an arpeggio played in two notes. The same arpeggio is heard at the end over the images of my son walking alone (without taking his father's hand), a sunrise and a bird taking flight. I use the music to accentuate my reflective state in front of the passing of time and life cycles.



Figure 7.5 2014-2024 by Armando Salazar, 2024

The exhibition is displayed to be viewed horizontally, with greater weight on black and white photographs and texts. As a second layer are the color photos of my childhood and at the end of the tour a monitor where you can see (and listen to) the short film. The photos are then a path that leads to the video. My goal with this is to achieve a journey through time through photography and film to put forward an idea of parenthood as a cycle to which we constantly return.

Images of the exhibition

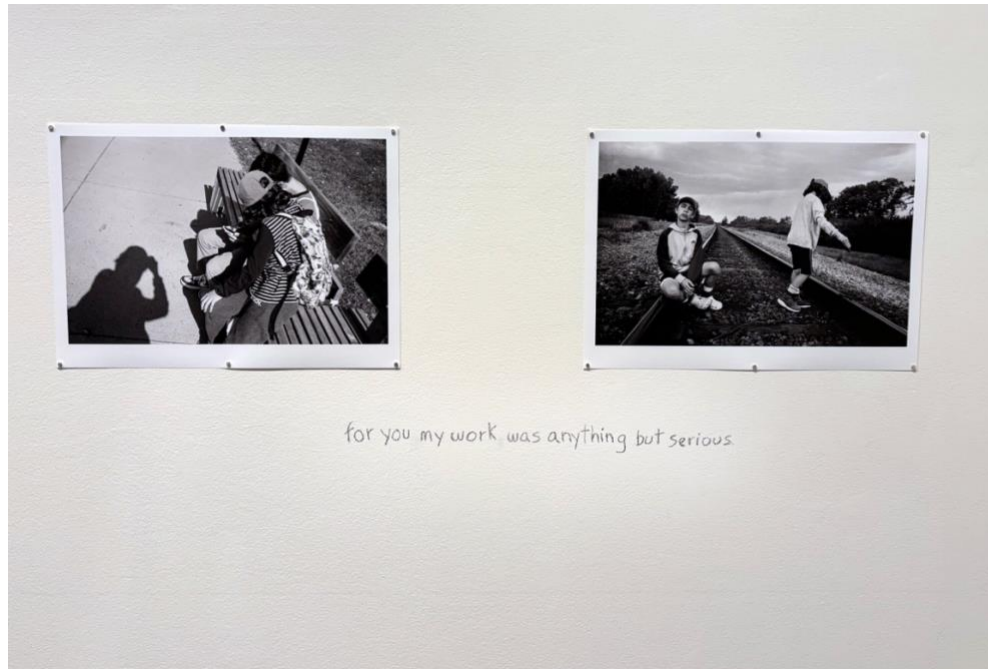


Figure 8.1 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024

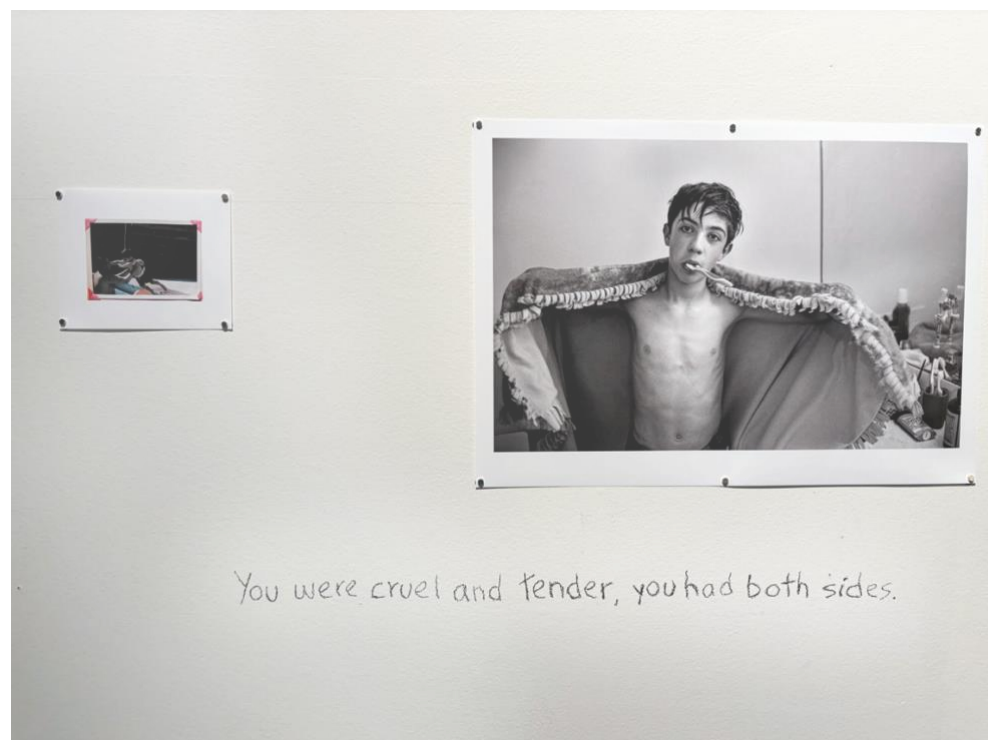


Figure 8.2 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 8.3 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024

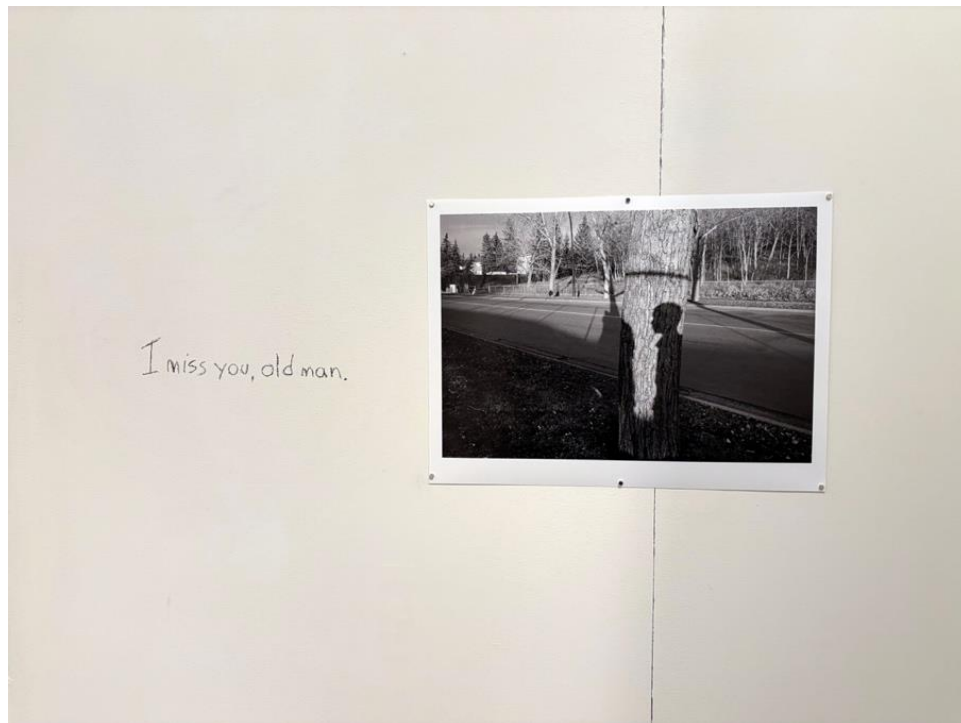


Figure 8.4 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 8.5 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024



Figure 8.6 *Letting Go* by Armando Salazar, 2024

Artist Statement

LETTING GO

35mm black and white photography

digital prints with texts and video

I have been photographing and filming my family since 2010 when my wife became pregnant with my first child. This triggered a need to capture what was happening to me (becoming a father). I approach this exploration using two cameras, one still and one video camera, each offering a different perspective on the ups and downs of my young children's lives. Upon arriving in Canada in 2022, I began to realize that my children's growth is also a gradual step towards separation and letting go, for both them and for me. LETTING GO focuses on the relationship I have with my thirteen and ten-year-old sons. In the process of doing this work, my relationship with my father, who passed away in 2018, has also come into sharper focus. Being a parent involves remembering and trying to understand what it was like to be a child. The memory of the past and expectations for the future go hand in hand, and I, as a father, occupy an intermediate place, a dynamic space always in flux. To be a father is to be a mirror and a shadow: the shadow that protects, the shadow that covers, the shadow that shelters, the shadow that darkens. I cast a shadow charged with worry and love. While I look into my children's futures my father's shadow is omnipresent, a specter against which I carefully choose my own path. The cycle I have explored repeats itself generation after generation. Like so many parents, I try to make things go better this time.

To my father, Paco

Armando Salazar Larrea

Calgary, August 2024

*Thanks to my wife, Paulina and my sons,
Elias and Nael, The Salazar Photography Fund,
my committee members, David and Charles
and especially Dona Schwartz, my supervisor,
for all her sensitivity and clarity
in getting this work where it is.*

Conclusions

This project-process has helped me reflect from a distance on the baggage I carry from my parents. I feel like I live a mirror relationship, but my gaze does not look directly into the mirror but to the side. Throughout these months, I feel that my photographic gaze has adjusted and so has my relationship with my children. In addition to serving as a record of their lives, it also serves to close a stage: the change of country. What lies ahead is the future.

My research topic is fatherhood and how it relates to my past and my childhood. Being a parent also involves connections and conflicts. I constantly remember my days as a child and how different my father's fatherhood was from mine. However, some practices and reactions that I recognize come from that time in my life. How do childhood memories and reminiscences influence my practice as a father of two children (ages 13 and 10) and the models I try to teach my children? My work explores these issues with the aim of raising questions about the difficulties and possibilities of parenthood. I hope to contribute to a conscious and healing way of thinking about parenthood.

I see this path as a coming and going from Fragility and Vulnerability towards Separation that passes through a state of Uncertainty and Adjustment. This adjustment implies accepting the impossibility of always having my child close to me, of still feeling him as a fragile and demanding child of my presence which is at the same time my need and dependence. I have also tried to understand why certain things in my children's behavior make me uncomfortable, such as constant interruptions, pending household chores, or certain infantile-juvenile issues that I do not

quite understand. But I also see a certain freedom and rebelliousness that challenges me as I am no longer able to have them. That is the model I try to transmit to my children, the one of incomprehension but respect at the same time. This energy is what provokes this work. Looking at the photos and the edited video, I feel a return that asks me, in front of my children, to be patient, to live in the present, to put myself in their place, to look at them and listen to them. This self-reflective practice appears at a crucial moment in my life and has allowed me to be able to open the doors and break the walls of silence. To be a father.

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